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ABSTRACT

This module provides information about the benefits of entering into a cooperative agreement with another agency. Also provided is information about developing successful agreements. The guide includes a list of definitions and uses a question-and-answer format to discuss the rationale for interagency cooperation, the best approach to coordination, essential elements for success, levels of coordination, benefits of interagency cooperation, sources of conflict and potential problems associated with interagency collaboration, common elements in planning, steps in developing a cooperative agreement, components of an agreement, and coordination of interagency agreement techniques. Sixteen references and a sample cooperative agreement are included. (KC)

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TITLE: COOPERATIVE INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

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CE 055 360

COOPERATIVE INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

Overview

Human service organizations have been involved in interagency cooperation since the establishment of charity organizations in the early 1900's. The earliest forms of cooperation and coordination occurred in an effort to provide services only to the "deserving poor." This involved primarily coordination of specific cases, but was also recognized as a way to avoid duplication in soliciting funds. The relatively few human service agencies basically looked out for themselves and cooperated when it was to their own advantage. This atmosphere continued until the early 1930's when, as a result of the great depression, many more human services and agencies were created by government.

The New Deal Era was a time when the ideology of many agency managers changed from independence to a recognition of the important role of social cooperation. This was due in part to public attitudes. There was growing pressure from society that coordination of the increasing number of public welfare agencies was necessary and should be the responsibility of the public sector to carry out.

In the 1960's the federal government began to show an interest in documented efforts at coordination. A 1960 report was published by the federal government describing various methods of interagency cooperation. The Federal Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968 gave states a new, more active role in coordination. This act also gave further impetus to coordination of human service organizations through its emphasis on program budgeting and cost effectiveness. As a result, the late 1960's was a period of increased attempts to coordinate efforts through centralized control and service integration.

Even though there was a great deal of emphasis placed on coordination by governments during the 1960's and early 70's, this was also a period of tremendous growth of social programs, particularly in the mid 1960's under the banner of the "Great Society."

By the late 1970's and early 80's, this picture began to change. More localized efforts and emphasis on coordination began to appear. Efforts by states were to some extent a bearing of fruit from the federal policies which had, since the late 1960's, encouraged coordination based on the assumption that coordination and planning will result in better utilization of resources and improve the quality of resources offered. These efforts were also related to the slumping economy and the tightening of resources available to human service agencies. Efforts of coordination increase during periods of reduced government funding, increased accountability and increased demands for services.
Collaboration among agencies has a long history. The results of these efforts appear positive and have resulted in more efficient services for people with handicaps.

SOURCE: Stafford, B.G. (1984). A review of literature on coordination. Nashville: Tennessee Children's Service Commission.

Definitions/Terminology

Interagency Coordination	A process in which two or more organizations come together to solve a specific problem or meet a specific need. It carries with it the assumption that by working together, agencies will increase their effectiveness, resource availability, and decision making capabilities, and thereby more effectively assist in the resolution of a community need or problem that could not be met by any single agency acting alone *(Canham, 1979).*
Cooperation	The process of informal working together to meet the day to day goals of the organization *(Black & Kase, 1963).*
Coordination	A formalized process of adjustment or utilization of existing resources through integrated action of two or more organizations *(Black & Kase, 1963).*
Collaboration	A more intensive jointly planned effort by organizations over a mutual concern which results in a mutually desired result *(Black & Kase, 1963).*

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. WHAT IS THE RATIONALE FOR INTERAGENCY COOPERATION?

A. Many factors contribute to an agency's decision to collaborate with other agencies. However, for successful planning of a cooperative program it is important that the central goal be to help students with disabilities achieve maximum independence and self-reliance. In order to achieve this goal, agencies must collaborate to improve their services. Agency involvement is often prompted by the realization that many youth (who have often dropped out of school) are being picked up too late to develop vocational skills leading to job placement. On the other hand, many schools realize that coordination between special education, vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and other agencies is critical for increasing the vocational options available students with special needs. Too many youth with disabilities leave the school system with no marketable job skills. In addition, interagency cooperation can be helpful in addressing other needs of the individual. Issues such as where people with disabilities will live, recreate, develop friendships and participate in other community services can be addressed with an interagency agreement. *(Minnesota Department of Education, 1988.)*

Also, coordination among agencies helps ensure a continuation of services for disabled students *(Cooperative Programs for Transition from School to Work, 1985).*

Q. WHAT IS THE BEST APPROACH TO INTERAGENCY COORDINATION?

A. There is no single model of successful coordination between various agencies. When considering planning for different coordination practices, it is important to realize that it is impossible to completely transplant a model and expect it to work for every situation. Programs demonstrating practices in interagency coordination generally fall into three different planning categories: a) state level cooperative agreements followed by state-wide training, local agreements and the development of local cooperative programs; b) state-initiated pilot projects leading to program expansion, local agreements and sometimes state level agreements; and c) the development of cooperative programs through local initiative. Evidence does not suggest that one planning strategy is more successful than another method. Successful coordination depends upon the community/state situation or setting and the commitment to the cooperative effort *(Cooperative Programs for Transition from School to Work, 1985).*

Q. WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERAGENCY COORDINATION?

A. Although no two interagency programs are the same, certain ingredients are common to successful interagency coordination. These ingredients include:

*AWARENESS	Know the other agencies involved. Determine their service responsibilities, roles in meeting the career development needs of special needs students, the function of the agency, and the clients served.
*INTERDEPENDENCE	Establish areas of similarity and difference in roles, functions, and services.
*STANDARDIZATION	Standardize procedures for referral and for obtaining and sharing information. Specify procedures for sharing equipment, facilities, staff, and costs.
*FORMALIZATION	Formalize the collaborative effort. When there are a number of participants from several agencies, prepare a formal agreement.
*COMMUNICATION	Recognize and communicate agency limitations as well as capabilities.
*COMMITMENT	Capitalize on commitment from the top; work for commitment from each agency representative *(Valentine, Truby & Pisapia, 1982).*

Q. WHAT ARE THE LEVELS OF COORDINATION?

A.

*Lowest Level	Agencies are familiar with the personnel and programs of other local organizations. There is some informal communication, as well as the exchange of general knowledge and data. Membership in joint councils can also be identified as a low level of interagency coordination.
*Intermediate	Agencies develop formal exchanges of information, resources, and personnel. They will participate in joint projects, although specific tasks and responsibilities are not clearly identified.
*Highest Level	Agencies are engaged in joint budgeting of programs. Specific agreements as to goals and policies are clearly understood, and probably written down as part of an overall joint agreement. Agencies are well represented on overlapping boards and councils *(Canham, 1979).*

Q. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INTERAGENCY COOPERATION?

A. There are benefits for both the agency and the community when organizations make a concerted effort to coordinate their programs and activities. Some of these benefits follow:

*Reducing duplication and overlap. With several agencies working to resolve similar problems and meet community needs, duplication of services and assistance can occur. Coordinating agencies can help avoid wasted effort by sharing resources and explicitly stating who is responsible for specific tasks.

*Covering gaps and oversight. Having several agencies actively working in a community does not ensure that all needs are addressed. Coordination promotes an exchange of ideas and viewpoints, leading to a broader definition of the community needs that joint agency efforts should address.

*Minimizing conflicts. Improved interagency coordination can often prevent unecessary conflicts. Agencies which are communicating and sharing ideas and information can avoid the mistaken interpretations of community needs that so often occur when organizations are working independently. Coordination can also facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of each individual agency's goals and purposes.

*Giving smaller agencies a voice. A small, single-purpose agency often has problems making its unique contribution in a comprehensive community assistance program. Agency coordination can assist the small, less visible, and/or new organization through the sharing of information, resources, and technical assistance, thereby improving each agency's effectiveness *(Canham, 1979)*.

Q. WHAT ARE SOME SOURCES OF CONFLICT AS WELL AS POTENTIAL PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ESTABLISHING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION?

A. Although many agencies agree that it is beneficial to coordinate as much as possible with other organizations, there needs to be more effort in this area. What does take place, may at times, reflect a low level of commitment. There are many reasons why cooperation does not exist. These include conflicts between people and the environment and problems inherent in agencies.

BARRIERS TO INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

The People:
*Value differences:
--personal
--professional
--agency
*Role pressures
*Perceptual differences
*Divergent goals
*Status threat
*Personality clash

The Environment:
*Lack of resources
*Change
*Ambiguous jurisdictions
*Communication barriers
--personal
--physical
*Dependence on one person/agency for agreement
*Complexity of organization(s)
*Need for consensus
*Regulations

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ESTABLISHING INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIONS

*Competitiveness of established institutions and agencies.
*Lack of an organizational structure that brings agencies together around mutual interest.
*Parochial interests of agencies that make them myopic to the needs of the broader community.
*Lack of experience in the techniques of coordinating service delivery.
*Awkward interdisciplinary communication.
*Preoccupation with the system design rather than the functional role of the system.
*Client confidentiality across agencies.
*Resistance to change.
*Response to external pressures.
*Lack of specific accountability.
*Lack of designated monitors and evaluators.
*Inadequate orientation within and outside agencies.
*Negative staff attitude.
*Lack of consideration of political bases.
(McLaughlin & Covert, 1984)

Q. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COMMON ELEMENTS IN PLANNING INTERAGENCY COOPERATION?

A. The organizational structure and the various activities of interagency programs differ according to size and location. However, several common planning elements which contribute to effective and lasting collaborative efforts exist. The following briefly analyzes these elements.

*The primary philosophical stance which provides the stimulus for interagency coordination as well as shaping service offerings reflects the concept that caeer eucation essential for special needs students in order to aid in their transition from school to adult life. Combining vocational and academic programming with the optional provision of work experience for students with disabilities represents a shift in policy for many high schools which have traditionally held that students with disabilities must reach a certain level of academic competence before vocational and/or career considerations can be addressed.

*Cooperative programs which attempt to provide comprehensive services generally resort to written guidelines in order to resolve conflicts resulting from differing mandates an differing interpretations of federal and/or state laws. Some type of written statement delineating roles and responsibilities, the sharing of resources and facilities, and the expenditure of dollars appears to be beneficial in maintaining an interagency program. Coordination between two or three different agency

professionals can occur and be effective without anything in writing. However, the evolution of these close working relationships into a comprehensive systematized program usually requires written clarification.

*Collaboration cannot be forced. All contributing parties must view it as necessary in order to achieve successful program operation. IF this does not occur, then conflicts and problems will erupt, demoralizing staff and seriously limiting program effectiveness. Requiring that all participating agencies contribute an equal share of the resources, whether it be funding, facilities, or staff time, will help instill a feeling of joint ownership and, hence, responsibility for the program.

*The use of cross-agency inservice training can aid the development of interagency coordination. Inservice staff development training can foster communication understanding of different agencies' mandates and policies, and provide an awareness of each person's job responsibilities.

*The assignment of a person(s) or an interagency committee to oversee the program and provide support is of significant importance to maintaining a cooperative program. Programs have collapsed due to factors which might have been minimized by an interagency coordinator(s) or committee *(Programs for Transition from School to Work, 1985)*.

Q. WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN DEVELOPING A COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT?

A. In a study of successful interagency projects, John McLaughlin (1984) of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University suggested that collaboration is most effective when planners have a plan, start small, proceed with order and method, approach each step in a timely and persistent manner, and finally, communicate.

*Have a plan: Set up a planning process which permits each agency to identify goals, objectives, and priorities. Discuss commitment of resources.

*Start small: Begin with one established priority and generate successful collaboration for that objective. Failure can result from overcommitment.

*Proceed with order and method: Proceed with an orderly system for prioritizing and selecting goals for collaboration.

*Approach each step in a timely and persistent manner: Operationalize the action plan as scheduled. Set up a mechanism for review and modification of action steps by the planning group.

*Communicate: Communication between and among planners is vital. Failures in communication lead to a breakdown in implementation. Interagency planniemands full communication between each participant. Keep each member fully informed. Document in writing key decisions *(Valentine, Truby & Pisapia, 1982).*

Q. WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF AN INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT?

A. According to Elder (1980), when an agreement is completed, it should have the following components:

*Clear statement of purpose with goals and measurable objectives.
*Definition of terms central to the operation of the agreement.
*Precise delineation of services to be provided by each agency.
*Statement of fiscal responsibility (if required) for each service provided.
*Designation of roles and responsibilities (within and across agencies) associated with each service or collaborative activity.
*Designation of staff positions within each agency responsible for:
-implementing the service
-monitoring the implementation
-negotiating change when necessary.
*Specification of general administration procedures including:
-scheduled meetings
-time period for the agreement
-client management
-mechanisms for change.
*Evaluation plan for determining the extent to which the agreement's short- and long-term objectives are met.

Q. WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATION OF INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS?

A. An individual(s) or committee should be assigned to monitor the program. When there is no such entity to advocate for the program, cooperative efforts may be eliminated from state budgets or die from lack of interest.

Both local programs and state-level programs need someone responsible for monitoring and advocating for the program. The coordinator keeps channels of communication open, initiates meetings and other events, provides technical assistance, takes responsibility for paperwork, and works on any problems which may arise. If this role is not filled, participants in the cooperative effort tend to get caught up in their own agency concerns and the cooperative effort falters.

Q. WHAT ORGANIZATIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN THE COOPERATIVE PROCESS?

A. Some potential members might include:

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Special Education
Vocational Education
Adult Basic Education
Community Colleges

GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

Vocational Rehabilitation
Mental Health
Developmental Disabilities
Job Training Partnership Act
Recreational Agencies
Social Security Administration

BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS

Private Industry Council
Corporate Businesses
Chamber of Commerce
Small Businesses

HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Rehabilitation Agencies
Transportation Agencies
Legal Services
Health Agencies and Services

OTHER

Parents
Students

AGREEMENT OF COOPERATION BETWEEN
THE DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
MISSOURI STATE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITHIN THE STATE

PURPOSE OF THE AGREEMENT

It has been demonstrated that an effective way to meet the needs of special education students is to emphasize vocational experiences in the secondary school setting. In order to involve the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in this process, certain procedures must be closely followed.

The purpose of this agreement is to implement procedures that will permit the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to encumber funds for services that are not readily available to the student by the local school district.

AGREEMENT OF COOPERATION

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education agrees:

A. To assign a rehabilitation counselor to work with the local school district and the assigned special education teacher in the development and implementation of a vocationally orientated program.

B. To determine the eligibility for rehabilitation services of all handicapped students referred to the agency.

C. To provide necessary services to eligible handicapped students in accordance with the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation providing that these services shall not conflict with the service responsibilities assigned to the public school district by Public Law 94-142, the "Education For All Handicapped Children" Act of 1975. Services will be provided only in instances where funding through P.L. 94-142 sources are not readily available.

D. To approve the nature and scope of services to be provided by Vocational Rehabilitation, in order to assure that these services supplement existing services available within the school curriculum.

E. To provide administrative, technical and consultative services as may be needed through state and district Vocational Rehabilitation staff.

F. The assigned Vocational Rehabilitation counselor will be available to serve as a participant in the development of the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) correlate the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program (IWRP) with the handicapped student's IEP to assure common objectives and goals and to assure total planning for the student.

G. To provide a copy of the IWRP to the public school district.

H. To perform other duties and functions necessary to carry out the program.

The participating Public School District agrees:

A. To establish a special education cooperative class on a secondary level.

B. To designate a certificated special education teacher to serve as a vocational adjustment coordinator to work with the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor assigned to the local school district.

C. To provide a minimum of one period per school day for release time to the vocational adjustment coordinator for each eight (8) to fifteen (15) handicapped students in the work experience program for adequate supervision.

D. To provide access to and copies of school records and evaluations required by Vocational Rehabilitation before services may be authorized by the Division.

E. The Vocational Adjustment Coordinator (VAC) will be available to serve as a participant in the development of the IWRP and will correlate the IEP with the IWRP in order to assure common objectives and goals and to assure total planning for the handicapped student.

F. To provide an Assurance of Compliance that there is a multidisciplinary assessment on file, an IEP has been developed, the proper programs have been applied and reasonably modified, and the parents have been advised of due process and made aware of the more restrictive environment of Vocational Rehabilitation.

G. To indicate on the student's IEP that the school lacks the resources to provide the needed services or is unable to provide the service in a timely manner.

H. To provide a copy of the IEP to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

I. To establish policies and procedures necessary for the district to comply with the requirements specified in the Missouri State Plan for Part B of the EHA as those requirements relate to the operation of cooperative school work programs in local education agencies. The district shall further incorporate the applicable policies in their compliance plan for P.L. 94-142.

J. To perform other duties and functions as assigned and necessary to carry out the program.

This agreement will be reviewed annually to determine if it should be continued and may be terminated by mutual agreement or by either party hereto on thirty (30) days written notice.

This agreement shall become effective upon its signing by the duly authorized representative of the parties hereto.

_____ _____

Superintendent, Date

_____School District

_____ _____

Don L. Gann, Assistant Commissioner Date
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

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